Attitudes of Student-teachers towards Written Teacher's Guide

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Abstract

The literature on Teacher's Guides combines knowledge of discipline-related content and pedagogy-related content in reference to the objectives and contents of the Ministry of Education curriculum. It serves as a self-study tool that provides guidelines of how to teach in light of the various changing goals and needs of the teacher. The corpus on which this research focused was the Teacher's Guide for Hebrew literature and the question we focused on was: Do student-teachers of Hebrew literature at a teacher education college who use this tool find that it meets their expectations? The qualitative and quantitative findings of the research, which involved 21 student-teachers for Hebrew literature at a teacher education college, led to the conclusion that the students' expectations of the Teacher's Guide differ from the disciplinary qualities and especially the didactic qualities it actually contains. The Teacher's Guide is not organized in a manner suited to student-teachers even though they are a primary target audience for it.

Keywords: Teaching-learning process, Teacher's Guide (TG), Teacher's Guide for Hebrew literature, Disciplinary objective, Didactic objective, Questionnaire evaluating the Teacher's Guide

1. Introduction

'Teacher's Guide literature' is a generic term for a broad system of tools (books, articles and booklets that accompany the students' textbook as well as technological tools of various kinds) which have a methodological-pedagogical orientation and are meant to help the teacher organize one or a series of classroom lessons. Such literature combines knowledge of discipline-related content and pedagogy-related content (Shulman, 1986, 1987) in reference to the objectives and contents of the Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum. In the field of Hebrew literature, the object of our research, we found 104 Teacher's Guides (TGs) alongside some 300 or more articles.

As researchers working in an environment of student-teachers, we are aware of two phenomena which underpin this study:

1) The college does not provide sufficient organized training on how and when to use TG materials: informing students about the different kinds of TGs and how to use them is not part of either pedagogy or methodology classes.
2) Student teachers tend to rely on TGs for their lessons and for the papers they submit in methodology and pedagogy classes and even in their disciplinary courses, without examining its quality too closely, mainly because they have no appropriate tools to make such an evaluation.

In such situations, the TG literature might actually be more of a stumbling block for novice teachers: they might use it uncritically without creating the proper balance between their own perceptions, which are still being formulated, and the great supply of TGs to which they have access at the pedagogical center and the library of their teacher training colleges.

The complexity of teaching Hebrew literature, which enables or requires the existence of several TGs, is the starting point for the basic question of this research. The aim of this study is to examine in what sense and how TGs can be a tool that promotes the teaching and learning of student-teachers of Hebrew literature. Abulafia (2006) stresses the fact that there are very few studies in Israel or elsewhere that deal with TG materials. We will add that as far as we know, no such study examining a TG has been conducted from the viewpoint of a student-teacher in the field of literature.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 The TG and Its Connection to the Teaching-Learning Process

The TG is the meeting point between the learning and teaching processes. In his book Chapters on lesson planning, Aden (1991) relates to a number of roles the written TG fulfills. The first role is to expand the teacher's knowledge about the topics of study included in the curriculum and its second role is to suggest ways to teach the topic to the students in various situations and/or to provide guidance for working with a class with the materials developed for the student.

The key purpose of the TG is to cultivate the autonomy and professional skills of the teacher. The TG constitutes a link between the learning processes of the teacher, who is learning-researching the topic of study, and the teaching process she adopts in the classroom. These roles represent the view that TG materials form a link between the discipline and the pedagogy. Hence, they can be a very important tool in teacher training.

Zilberstein (1991) notes that one should distinguish between 'curriculum' and 'teaching learning materials'. With this distinction the writer stresses the fact that the curriculum is the ideational and content basis for planning lessons, while the teaching-learning materials are the means through which the objectives of the curriculum can be attained. The teaching-learning materials are student-oriented and include a number of means and conventional (written) teaching aids in the form of booklets and anthologies, as well as unconventional technology-rich means such as films, slides, pictures, models and computer materials. The TG presents ways to use these aids intelligently. Here we see the view that the TG is a tool that helps navigate the students' teaching-learning process.

The TG is a kind of 'study guide' common mainly in academic study. The study guide is primarily a teaching tool written by an 'expert' who presents the requirements of the content and the knowledge to the person who is 'learning' or 'in training'. According to the distinctions made by Harden and Laidlaw (1999) and Harden (2002), the purpose of the study guide is to generate meaningful learning: it offers a formal list of key topics on which the learner is required to dwell, and also a list of skills the learner should master by the end of the course of study. The study guide may contain formal sections of the course such as lectures, discussions and visual aids, as well as exercises and questions that demonstrate the requirements the students are expected to meet. The study guide usually also contains a list of sub-topics, suggestions for supplementary materials for knowledge expansion and references to all kinds of information pertaining to the course, such as where to find a bank of exams, papers and articles.

From this point of view, the TG is a teaching tool in which the 'expert' lays out the formal objectives of the content and skills that are the basic requirements of the study material. The TG, like the study guide, is a tool which defines and organizes the curriculum. However, unlike the study guide, the object of which is the student, the text of the TG has a dual object: formally it is intended for the teacher, but in fact it relates to the students by suggesting to the teacher ways of teaching and learning in the classroom.

An important criterion of a TG is how it addresses the teacher-users in terms of their characteristics and needs. On this issue, Kigen (2000) claims that if the TG offers a variety of different, "open" options, teacher's feels safe to choose one of them, but if the TG itself is written in the form of indoctrination, then teachers will feel less confident about developing flexibility regarding the suggestions made. We found a similar viewpoint in Bentov (1995) who noted that the TG only formally represents the curriculum and that the teacher-users should develop a teaching-learning process that is most appropriate for their classes on their own, either from experience or through colleagues (other teachers, parents and even the students).

Reference to this perspective - that the TG should be oriented towards the teacher who conducts the teaching-learning process in the classroom - is found in studies by Shkedi and by Abulafia (2006), who relates to the TG for biology from the perspective of the teacher-user. In his first study, Shkedi (1995) examined the features of what teachers considered a good TG such as: what balance between content and didactics should teachers find in the TG? Does the TG help teachers adapt the study material and the learning process to the students and conditions of a particular class? In later studies Shkedi (1998, 2003) examined the possibility of developing a TG that could be potentially useful both for teachers seeking guidance ("educated" teachers) and for those who wish to work independently of the TG ("emancipated" teachers). The research question he posed was: "Is it possible to develop a

TG that will give teachers guidance regarding a content-dependent pedagogical approach while still giving them a sense of autonomy, and is such a distinction possible?" We also found a literature TG by Reigeluth (1987) sorted into three groups of users: a. the novice teacher b. the experienced teacher c. the pedagogical guide for the inspector another criterion of the TG is its suitability for student-teachers in training, the topic of this study. Shihab et al., (2010) discuss this in regard to student-teachers. The TG constitutes an additional kind of knowledge that is essential for the professional capabilities of the student-teacher. The topic is not discussed as part of one of the types of knowledge the teacher requires for the teaching process. Avdor (2003) categorizes the types of teacher knowledge in reference to the features of the curriculum for training teachers. She lists the following categories: abstract academic knowledge, practical knowledge and technological knowledge. She believes that the technological knowledge is the possibility of solving problems relating to teaching through a combination of general and personal knowledge. She also stresses reflection as a tool for intensifying training. The TG is not presented as a teacher training tool, even though it provides, or could provide, the student-teacher with all three types of information (see below on the research process) with regard to the task of planning lessons. Krinsky & Zilberstein (1991) stress that disciplinary knowledge and mastery is the foundation of the praxis of teaching the subject. They claim that teaching literature as a vehicle for conveying educational messages is not possible unless the teacher has fully mastered the discipline. In the schema for the analysis of learning materials, Ben Peretz (1991) relates to TGs that accompany anthologies included in the curriculum. The "schema for the analysis of study content" of Ariav (1997) is also presented by the author as one of the tools and procedures for interpreting the curriculum.

2.2 TGs for the Teaching of Hebrew Literature – An Overview

Literature represents the human spirit and culture (Barzel, 1990; Landau, 2006, 2010) historically, anthropologically, ideologically, linguistically and esthetically. Thus the discipline of literature is a broad and rich cross-section of works both in original language and in translation, which rely on methods of interpretation and research that have been developing from the time of Aristotle to the present day. Every piece of literature is examined both as an autonomous text and in reference to its broader cultural context (Feingold, 1991). New perspectives regarding reading processes (Shimron, 1989) and reading's place - bringing the text to life for the reader (Barthes, 2005) have also influenced the purposes of teaching literature and its teaching methods (de Malach, 2008). Poyas (2004) review the essence of literature assessment and from their theoretical review we learn that from the many discussions about how to determine the quality of the literature ("What is good literature?") it became necessary to examine how literary quality was judged. This is one of many examples of the esthetic perspective that creates a need for a supplementary book for the students and for a TG. Literature is a realm that can instill the learner with values of culture, esthetics and a richness of language alongside the ability to create an emotional and intellectual experience and can be the starting point for the development of different aspects of the personality of the child and the adolescent (Adar, 1959). A look at the MoE curriculum for middle school (Ministry of Education, 1992, p. 6) and for high school (2001) reveals a variety of directions for the teaching of Hebrew literature with reference to a long list of works for intensive and extensive study. The curriculum presents various objectives for the teaching of literature: making the reading of literary works an interesting and pleasurable experience; seeing the literary text as a unique and complex statement that can be received and responded to in a variety of ways; deepening the learners' understanding of themselves and their attitudes towards others through the encounter with the events and experiences appearing in the literary work; strengthening the students' bonds to the country and its national and cultural heritage; expansion of the students' mastery of the Hebrew language and improvement of the oral and written verbal skills; developing the ability to understand and evaluate attitudes embedded in the literary work on social, national and global humanistic issues with reference both to the context of the period in which the piece was written and to contemporary reality; expansion of horizons and developing imagination through the encounter with a variety of characters and situations from different times and cultures; enabling the possibility of interdisciplinary observation with reference to other areas of knowledge and arts. In this context, there is room for all kinds of creative activity such as: dramatization, painting, composing and playing music (taken from the high school curriculum, 2001).

In other words, the abundance of works from which teachers may choose to teach alongside different kinds of objectives for the teaching of literature creates the background for the generation of a significant amount of guidance material. Kigen (2000) tries to suggest various ways to connect the list of texts, the various teaching objectives, the basic features of literature, the connection to the population of learners and to the teachers' attitudes and preferences. The TGs for teaching literature are a large corpus that offers the student-teachers of literature many options for navigating their first steps in preparing plans for their practice lessons. The question is: can student-teachers find what they need within this abundance of information? Are most or some of the TGs suited to the unique position of this particular group of "users"?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Aim

The aim of the research was to map out the needs regarding TGs from the perspective of student-teachers of Hebrew literature.

3.2 Research Population

The research population included 21 student-teachers of Hebrew literature in elementary school (11 students) and middle school (10 students) in their third year of studies.

3.3 Research Tools

A closed questionnaire: we used a questionnaire for evaluating a TG for literature. The questionnaire was produced by the researchers in light of the theoretical background presented above regarding the purposes and qualities of the TG, and on the basis of Johnson's theory (1958) for determining the features and qualities of a discrete product according to the phases of Discovery, Identification and Recognition. According to Johnson's theory, there are three phases for evaluating a product: discovery identification and recognition. Our questionnaire was written in terms of the discovery and identification phases of Johnson's method. These two phases enable production of a control questionnaire through which it is possible to estimate each item belonging to a kind of TG according to primary and secondary characteristics. The recognition phase is one in which each TG is examined according to the characteristics of the type and is given its own profile. The information received from the completed closed questionnaire on two occasions was processed statistically as follows: the total score of each column was calculated and then divided by the number of items. The score obtained enabled a more refined perspective of the role of the TG in real time.

The questionnaire served to create a profile of TGs generated by the research population.

Open interviews: The student teachers were asked to describe how they used the TG to perform a particular task of preparing 2-3 literature lessons for their week of practical work and to give a verbal evaluation of the relevance of the TG they used to perform the task.

3.4 Research Method

The research method included two stages:

Stage 1: The students were asked to evaluate the importance of the TG for literature according their educational-methodological perspective and/or in light of their experience so far, and to evaluate each component on a scale of 1 to 5. The data obtained provided information about their perception of the place and role of the TG in light of their own needs.

Stage 2: (about one month after the first stage, during the week prior to the week of practical work) each student-teacher was asked to select one or more TGs (librarians from the pedagogical center helped them locate TGs relevant for the pieces and for the class). At the end of the preparation of the lesson plans using the TGs, each student teacher was asked to complete the research questionnaire for the guide or guides she had used. At this point, we also conducted individual interviews with each of the student-teachers about their evaluation of the TG/s and how they used it/them. We summarize the conclusion about the place and importance of the TGs for student-teachers of Hebrew literature during their pre-service training.

4. Findings

Insert Table 1 in here.

Key findings from Table 1. Table 1 shows the general attitude towards the TG in terms of its usefulness (column A) compared to the attitude towards a specific TG used to prepare lesson plans for the week of practical work (column B). From the findings in column A it appears that the student-teacher of literature attaches great importance to the pedagogical aspect of the TG: questions for class discussion (4.24), presentation of main theme and/or overall goals (4.04), list of didactic objectives (4.03), order of instruction (3.98), comparison to other works (3.98), varied suggestions for teaching the text (3.83), a variety of supplementary materials (3.24) and suggested test (3.42). The attitude towards instruction on teaching literary terms was also deemed important in the eyes of the student-teachers (3.72). Similarly, the friendliness of the format in which the TG addresses the user was also important (3.17). The content-related topics were seen as of lesser importance: the writer's world view (2.05) was less important than a clear approach to interpretation (3.06). The bibliography (3.08) was more important than references and comments (2.93). The rationale was important to the student-teacher (3.44) as well as the fact that the TG cateredg to a particular target audience (3.56).

The findings from column B reflect a certain disappointment with one or more of the TGs used. Item 21 - questions for class discussion - was found much less than expected (2.64 vs. 4.26). The student-teachers look to the TG for solutions to problems and issues related to the organization of the material for the lesson. Item 19 – a list of didactic objectives - was also found to a lesser extent than expected (2.32 vs. 4.03). In item 17, the student-teachers' need to find a suggested order of activities was very evident, i.e. reference to the order of teaching of sub-topics during the lesson. Here too, the TGs hardly met the requirements (2.04 vs. 3.98). Particularly noticeable are items 14, 7 and 10. For item 14 – suggested time allocation – i.e. how much time to spend on each topic during the lesson, it was found that the TGs very clearly did not cater to this need (1.48 vs. 3.48). The need for a suggested test and for a friendly format in terms of how it addressed the user is barely catered to in the TG (item 10: 1.30 vs. 3.42 and item 7: 1.78 vs. 3.17). There are items for which the TG closely matched the expectations and needs of the student teachers such as item 12 – a distinct target audience – (3.50 vs. 3.56). There are items for which the TG provided more than students expected such as in items 1 and 2, which were ranked as less important by the students: Item 1 – the writer's worldview – was scored at 2.5 by the student teachers but was evident in the TGs to a much greater degree (3.76). Item 2 – questions for thought - was ranked with 2.89 and found in the TGs at the higher score of 3.7.

Insert Table 2 in here.

5. Discussion

The TG is a teaching tool designed to expand and implement the curriculum. In the TG there are two parallel teaching-learning processes: like the study guide, the TG itself is a teaching tool by means of which the teacher-user learns the curriculum, the teaching goals and the method of literary analysis of the text/s and ways the topics and its parts can be taught to the students. Hence the TG is also oriented towards the teaching-learning processes taking place in the classroom. There are many Hebrew literature TGs and this is because of the many objectives or trends in teaching literature and because of the multiple social groups within Israeli society, where each TG chooses to target a particular group, as presented in the title and/or the rationale.

From the analysis of the findings in Table 1 (column A) it appears that the level of expectations the student-teacher has of the TG is mainly in the sphere of suggesting didactic activities during the lesson or for a unit of teaching. The starting point for ranking the items looks as if it derived from the 'here and now' of the student teacher's own needs and deliberations: what discussion questions should be asked? What are the overall objectives (of the teaching unit) and what are the specific objectives for each lesson? In what order should the topics be taught? How much time should be devoted to each topic? How can the teaching be varied? What teaching aids should be used with this piece of literature? How should we teach literary terms? What assignments should be given for homework? As the teacher guide has examples of test?

All of these imply that the rationale underlying the teaching approach presented in the TG is also important to the student-teachers, as is the bibliography from which they can derive more information and also the way the target audience is addressed, mainly on the understanding that the method of teaching has to be modified to suit every class/group (i.e. differential teaching). The student-teachers are also aware of the fact that the TG requires immersion into the disciplinary content and teaching methods and so they attach great importance to the friendliness of the TG and express' anger' when it is written in a manner they find 'confusing'.

From the analysis of the findings in Table 1 (Column B), Table 2 and from the examples of the kinds of statements made, it seems that the student-teachers look to the TG for solutions to problems and issues related to the organization of the lesson plans. In the TGs, the student-teachers of Hebrew literature find explanations and analyses of the texts rather than specific guidance for teaching in the classroom. TGs containing a lot of varied and convenient didactic material receive a positive evaluation and give the student-teachers a positive sense of satisfaction. Conversely, a TG that mainly offers an analysis of the text with less didactic material arouses disappointment and even anger ("I'm never going to use that TG again"). The findings in column B reflect a certain 'disappointment' with the TGs used.

The study findings lead us to conclude that there is a clear match between the didactic needs of the student-teachers and the positive or negative evaluation accorded the TG. From the statements made, it is evident that the student-teachers are aware of their needs and of the contents they need to prepare for their classes: a variety of activities, thought-provoking questions, examples of good wording of questions, use of technology and materials from tangential disciplines which can be compared with the text in question and so forth. These findings concur with the earlier mentioned research of Shihab et al., (2010): student-teachers in pre-service training prefer a TG written from the perspective of their needs as 'teachers in training'.

We would like to mention that on the research questionnaire there was a division between sections representing the theoretical essence of the TG and those representing its didactic essence. From the student-teachers' perspective, the

TG should be divided into three parts: the first dealing with theory, the second with the general didactic essence, i.e. defining the overall objectives, questions and suggested activities relevant to the teaching unit in general. But the research findings show that in a TG designed for teachers in training, there is also a need to break down the teaching unit into discrete sub-topics: didactic objectives for each lesson, a variety of activities, distinctions between class tasks, homework assignments and tests, suggested order of teaching and a timetable as well as demonstration of learning activities including issues such as the repertoire of literary terms to be taught in each lesson and instruction on how to teach them.

A TG in which the student-teachers find these three sections will constitute a benchmark for them or as one of them said in her interview: "The TG helps to a certain extent from which we have to grow."

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Table 1. Features of a literature TG from the viewpoint of the student-teachers (n=21)

TG features	A General average per feature before working with a TG	B General average per feature after work with the TG
1. Writer's world view	2.50	3.76
2. Thought provoking questions	2.89	3.70
3. References and comments	2.93	2.83
4. Homework assignments	3.03	2.09
5. Clear approach to interpretation	3.06	2.98
6. Bibliography	3.08	2.73
7. User-friendly format	3.17	1.78
8. A supplementary tool as a suggestion to the teacher	3.24	2.57
9. Expansion/variety of supplementary materials	3.24	2.67
10. Suggested test	3.42	1.30
11. Rationale	3.44	3.26
12. Distinct target audience	3.56	3.50
13. Concepts	3.72	2.77
14. Suggested time allocation	3.75	1.48
15. Varied suggestions for teaching the piece section	3.83	3.91
16. Comparison to other pieces sections (films, paintings)	3.98	2.50
17. Order of instruction	3.98	2.04
18. Existence of theoretical material	4.00	2.41
19. List of didactic objectives	4.03	2.32
20. Main theme / overall goals	4.04	2.95
21. Questions for class discussion	4.24	2.64

Table 2. Statements that emerged from the interviews with the student teachers (n=-21)

The student teachers' comments gave rise to 72 statements which were then classified according to two types of criteria:

a. The sphere of the statements: the reference to theoretical aspects / to pedagogical-didactic aspects / general features (overview)

b. The attitude taken: positive / negative / neutral / suggested improvement

	Positive statements	Negative statements	Neutral statements
Reference to theoretical aspects	20	5	
Reference to pedagogical-didactic aspects	18	20	
General features	5		
	42	29	1

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